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DEPARTMENT FOR NEA/ARP AND ISN

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/03/2018
TAGS: [KCIP](#) [KGIC](#) [KNNP](#) [SA](#) [PREL](#) [IR](#) [PINR](#) [PGOV](#)
SUBJECT: SAUDI LEADERSHIP KEENLY INTERESTED IN PEACEFUL
NUCLEAR COOPERATION WITH THE US

Classified By: DCM Michael Gfoeller for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (S) Summary: Acting Assistant Secretary for International Security and Nonproliferation Patricia McNerney led an 8-person delegation to Riyadh, February 26-27, to consult with senior Saudi Arabian Government (SAG) officials about possible U.S. engagement with the Kingdom on civilian nuclear energy cooperation. Senior SAG leadership, including the Foreign Minister, enthusiastically expressed their interest in establishing a dialogue with the USG on this subject and moving as rapidly as possible toward robust bilateral cooperation on civilian nuclear power. They were also highly receptive to USG nonproliferation arguments. End Summary.

The Message

¶2. (S) During four meetings in Riyadh, the delegation announced the USG's interest in helping the Kingdom to develop a civil nuclear energy infrastructure, in a framework consistent with U.S. nonproliferation policy and IAEA standards. The delegation also addressed the Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism and the Proliferation Security Initiative. Ambassador Wolcott, the Special Envoy of the Undersecretary for Arms Control and International Security, explained to the senior SAG leadership the US-Russian Joint Declaration on Nuclear Energy and Nonproliferation and its implications for the development of civilian nuclear power in Saudi Arabia.

MFA: Extremely Enthusiastic

¶3. (S) Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Prince Saud Al-Faisal responded to the delegation's presentation by stating that, "The danger of proliferation in the region is palpable, especially after the Iranian adventure." He enthusiastically supported the idea of US-Saudi cooperation on nuclear energy and expressed confidence that the two governments would be

able to agree on nonproliferation issues quickly. He also noted that consistency in applying the policy of non-proliferation would have a strong impact on the region. The Prince noted his continued interest in a Saudi plan for a regional nuclear consortium to guarantee the nuclear fuel supply for each member state; Iran, he joked, supported this plan, but only so long as the consortium would be based in Iran. The Foreign Minister agreed strongly with the notion that US-Saudi cooperation on nuclear power and nonproliferation could serve as a powerful and influential counterbalance to Iran's flouting of international law and the United Nations in its own nuclear weapons program.

¶4. (S) Prince Saud added that the responsible officials in his government will be very happy to coordinate with the USG on all matters regarding nuclear cooperation and nonproliferation. He expressed some concern about potential problems related to Congressional approval of the eventual US-Saudi 123 Agreement, but added that the SAG wants the bilateral dialogue to progress quickly and is ready to cooperate. He added that the SAG has already formed a working group to deal with its "nuclear project," which should be able to get to work immediately on the draft memorandum of understanding regarding bilateral nuclear cooperation. Finally, he said that US nonproliferation standards appear to "conform to Saudi foreign policy."

Ministry of Interior: Very Smart Proposal

¶5. (S) Assistant Interior Minister for Counter-Terrorism Prince Mohamed bin Naif shared the Foreign Minister's enthusiasm for US-Saudi nuclear cooperation. The Prince noted that security remains the top concern for the MOI. The Ministry has brought creativity and resourcefulness to solving complex problems in the past, he noted, and it would similarly do so in this case. He lent early praise to the USG-SAG partnership for civil nuclear energy, summarizing the delegation's presentation as a "very smart proposal." He also stated that he is personally opposed the idea of the Kingdom acquiring nuclear weapons. "Such weapons are dangerous, and we should not have them," he said, adding, "what we need is civilian nuclear technology. This is what you are offering us, and I welcome it." He also said, smiling slightly, that, "If ever this country wanted to

acquire nuclear weapons, I would know, since they would have to ask me to guard them. I am against it."

Intelligence Chief Supportive

¶6. (S) When the delegation met with General Intelligence Presidency Director Prince Muqrin bin Abd al-Aziz, they received similarly promising feedback. Prince Muqrin said that as the Kingdom's growing industrial zones are power-thirsty, civilian nuclear power is essential for the country's future. He also underlined the need to desalinate vast amounts of water for the growing Saudi population and to establish an industrial base that can survive the inevitable end of the oil era. The Director identified earthquake fault lines, environmental concerns, and personnel security as key elements of concern in terms of the security of future nuclear sites. He also expressed eagerness to begin a dialogue with the U.S. on this issue.

KACST - Preliminary Discussions

¶7. (S) Both the policy and the subject-expert teams met with Dr. Prince Turki bin Saud bin Mohammed Al-Saud, Vice President for Research Institutes at the King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology (KACST). KACST houses the Kingdom's repository of atomic research, although it is

currently limited in scope to nuclear medicine and related disciplines. Prince Turki noted that the Kingdom sees nuclear and solar energy as the only two alternatives to oil-derived electricity generation and that they are urgently needed for large scale development projects and for "future generations." The Prince noted his concern of "foregoing rights" as a precondition for cooperation, adding that, "It is important to see cooperation without restrictions on us that do not exist on other countries." The delegation noted that the U.S. does not cooperate with Israel's nuclear programs and that the language of the memorandum of understanding would reaffirm all rights of the Kingdom.

KACST) Experts' Discussions

18. (S) Prince Turki led an experts' discussion on nuclear energy development, stating that, "He would prefer to work with the USG on nuclear issues." He feared development of a nuclear cartel without an agreement in place to ensure access to nuclear fuel for the SAG. He noted that he wanted to avoid U.S. Congressional involvement in this program because of his perception that Congress is biased against the SAG and would likely impede engagement. He also expressed fears that any type of agreement, even if it is not binding, could be used against the SAG in the future.

19. (S) Comment: The remarks made by the senior political leadership of the SAG make it clear that the Saudis are ready to work expeditiously with the USG to develop a robust program of cooperation on civilian nuclear power. The Saudi government appears to be favoring cooperation with the USG in this area for political as well as technological reasons. With one eye at least always on the growing threat from Iran and its nuclear weapons program, the SAG seems to see nuclear cooperation with the US as a guarantee of its future security in an increasingly dangerous region. End Comment.
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